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SUBJECT: JAILED JOURNALISTS FAIL ON APPEAL: 18 MONTHS
PRISON FOR EACH

REF: A. NIAMEY 865

[1](#)B. NIAMEY 847

[1](#)1. Mamane Abou and Oumarou Keita, jailed publisher and editor-in-chief of Niger's leading opposition weekly, "Le Republican," had appealed their September 1 convictions and eighteen month prison sentences to the Niamey Court of Appeals (reftel A). On September 25, that court ruled against them - re-affirming the sentences, which both men have effectively been serving since their arrest and imprisonment on August 4. Given the weakness of their legal case (reftel A), the result was not surprising. However, to the extent that the charges reflected an attempt by the Government of Niger (GON) and Prime Minister Hama Amadou to punish "Le Republican" for its earlier, unimpeachable, reporting on corruption issues, the new verdict is a sad one for Nigerien civil society and the free press that often best represents it.

[1](#)2. Meanwhile, on September 15, Salifou Dago, editor of the independent newspaper "L'Enqueteur," was sentenced to six months imprisonment for "tarnishing the image of the country," after his paper printed a story relating to an alleged human sacrifice in the Niamey cemetery. According to Press FSN, Dago has a reputation for printing rumors and erroneous information, and there is no evidence to suggest that this story was any exception; however, post sources indicate that the GON's response may have been more forceful due to the fact that the story gained considerable currency in the Nigerien street. The director of the same paper was detained for questioning by the Detective Branch of the Nigerien National Police on September 22 after writing an article on the public education funds scandal (reftel B), which featured documents obtained from the Ministry of Basic Education. Ironically, the director himself had played a minor role in the education scandal. He recently reimbursed the GON 300,000 CFA (approximately \$580.00) after having allegedly sold inferior grade paper to the school system. He was released on September 25.

[1](#)3. Finally, Ibrahim Manzo, the editor of another small private weekly, "L'Autre Observateur" was called for questioning by the Niamey prosecutor after he published an article accusing the director of the GON's public transportation authority of embezzling funds. The editor is scheduled to appear before the Niamey prosecutor to address the director's allegations of defamation on September 29.

[1](#)4. COMMENT: Collectively, these vignettes paint a picture of the ongoing clash between often unprofessional media and a government with little respect for the concept of press freedom. Since PM Amadou's August 5 press conference in which he threatened to wield Niger's criminal defamation laws against unprofessional journalists (reftel A), the pace of prosecutions has accelerated. Whether commenting on issues

profound or bizarre - and the above examples suggest the range - Nigerian journalists are at risk of costly legal retaliation. At best, this spate of prosecutions is a poor way to curb the excesses of a loquacious and immature private press; at worst, it represents a real step back for a country that has realized significant advances in press freedom over the last fifteen years. END COMMENT
ALLEN